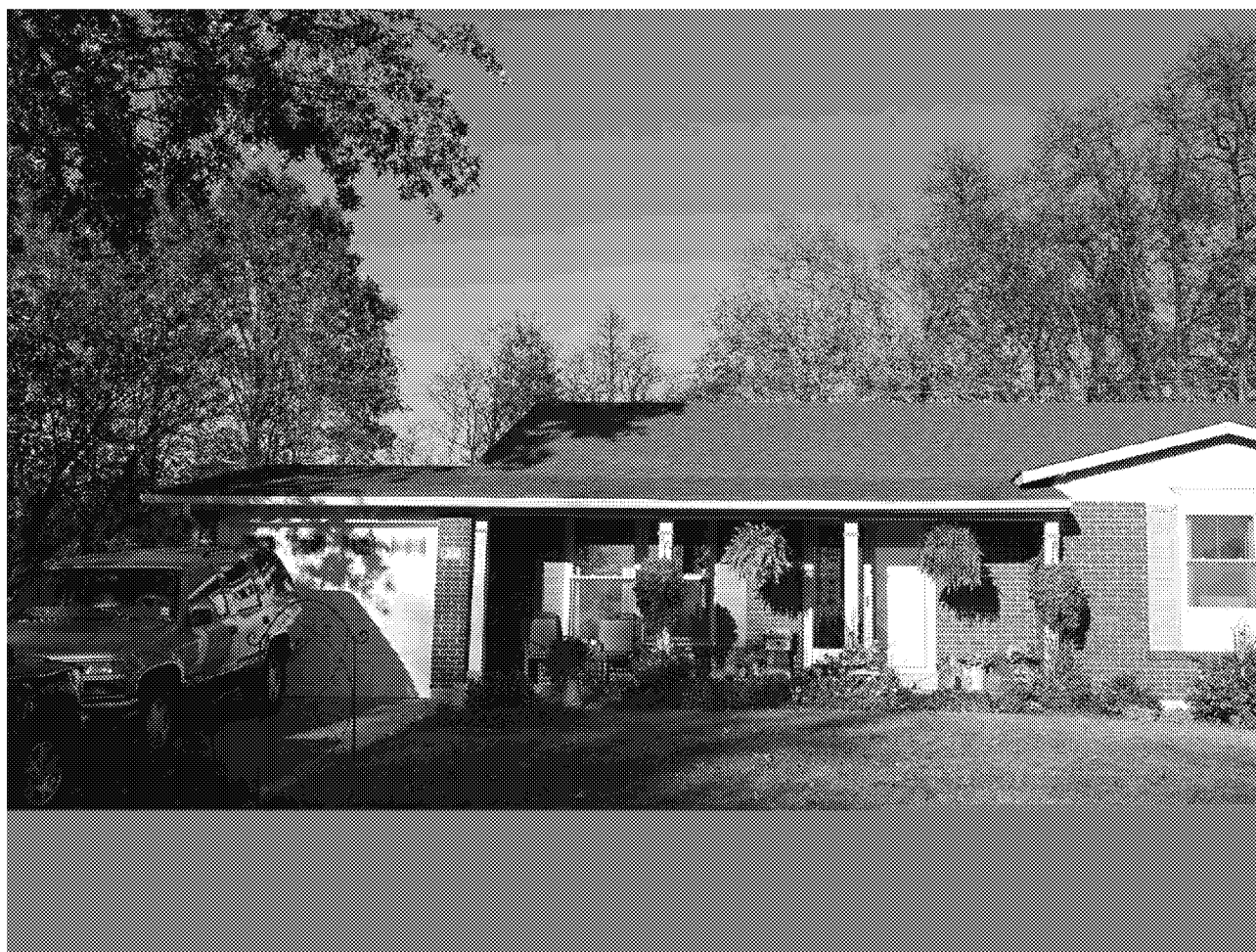


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http://www.stltoday.com/business/local/company-that-tested-bridgeton-homes-for-radiation-falsified-similar-sampling/article_b83d4d79-0440-5a61-9ccd-0dbbec0c8bb4.html

Company that tested Bridgeton homes for radiation falsified similar sampling in California

By Bryce Gray St. Louis Post-Dispatch Jan 24, 2017



The home of Robbin Dailey and her husband Michael Dailey located in the 3500 block of El Ferrol Court in Bridgeton as seen Tuesday, Nov. 15, 2016. The Daileys' home was tested for radioactive material and a sample taken from in the kitchen was found to be 1000X above the background levels of Thorium 230. The Daileys' house also tested positive for radioactive dust in several places in their basement. Photo By David Carson, dcarson@post-dispatch.com

The contractor that partnered with the Environmental Protection Agency to test Bridgeton homes for radioactivity last month "deliberately falsified" similar sampling efforts in the past, according to an October report from government nuclear regulators.

The report, issued by the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), details an investigation into the consulting and engineering firm, Tetra Tech Inc. It found that at least two individuals with the company "deliberately falsified soil sample surveys" at a California site in 2011 or 2012, during cleanup work for the U.S. Navy.

The investigation conducted from 2014 to 2015 also determined that during testing at the Hunters Point Naval Shipyard in San Francisco, Tetra Tech failed to survey areas "that were reasonable to evaluate concentrations and potential radiological hazards of residual radioactivity."

Despite the report, regional EPA representatives said there was "no concern" that the sampling conducted with Tetra Tech in Bridgeton was compromised in any way. That sampling examined homes on the 3500 block of El Ferrol Court after a couple living on the street filed a lawsuit in November alleging that household dust and soil showed elevated levels of radioactivity matching the signature of the nuclear waste in the nearby West Lake Landfill.

"All of the soil samples were collected by EPA personnel, and the dust and swipe samples were collected by both EPA and Tetra Tech on mixed teams," said Ben Washburn, a spokesman for EPA Region 7, said in a statement. "In no case did Tetra Tech operate independently from EPA in the collection, storage, transport, or custody of the samples collected in Spanish Village."

The EPA has stated that tests of the samples collected are expected to take two months to process, and that Tetra Tech will not be involved with the analysis.

In the wake of its sampling violations in California, Tetra Tech reached an agreement with the NRC to avoid a \$7,000 penalty under the condition that the company discuss "lessons-learned from the event" with its employees, conduct additional safety training and eventually consent to an independent assessment of the company's "safety culture." The

NRC, which licenses Tetra Tech to conduct such work, notified the EPA of the commission's decision of enforcement in July, according to Diane Screnci, NRC public affairs officer.

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But critics say the infractions are another reason they're troubled by the EPA's continued involvement with the company, adding to previous concerns about a possible conflict of interest, since Tetra Tech counts the landfill's operator, Republic Services, as a client.

"We just want EPA to use unbiased, competent scientists to test our neighborhoods," Dawn Chapman, an activist with Just Moms STL, said a statement. "Nobody would choose to put their children's lives in the hands of a private contractor that works for the landfill and that has a history of falsifying the same type of tests."

Ed Smith, policy director for the Missouri Coalition for the Environment, said Tetra Tech's offense makes him wonder what it would take for the EPA to sever ties with a contractor.

"How long will the EPA allow these bad actors to keep representing these responsible parties (at the landfill)?" Smith said. He believes the controversy also underscores that the landfill's cleanup should be transferred to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and away from the EPA Superfund process, where he says responsible parties have too much control over "picking and choosing" the approach.

The EPA's relationship with contractors could be further complicated by actions taken Tuesday by President Donald Trump. A freeze was applied to the agency's grants and contracts, subjecting billions of dollars of projects and partnerships to review. Regional EPA officials could not say what impact the action may have locally. Smith sought more information, but feared that it may threaten contractors such as the Technical Assistance Services for Communities, which helps distill hundreds of pages of tedious EPA documents into concise fact sheets upon request from the public.

"(If discontinued) that is an area that really hampers the public's ability to understand what's happening at the West Lake Landfill going forward," said Smith.

It was also reported that the Trump Administration issued a separate notice Tuesday forbidding the EPA from communicating with the media. But as of Tuesday afternoon, Region 7 EPA personnel said they had not received such instructions.

Bryce Gray

Reporter covering energy and the environment for the St. Louis Post-Dispatch.